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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: JORDAN'S NEW CABINET MINISTERS--CORRECTED VERSION

REF: A. AMMAN 9145

[1](#)B. AMMAN 9201

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DAVID HALE FOR REASONS 1.4 (b and d)

[1](#)1. (C) On November 23, the King announced that Marouf al-Bakhit would succeed Adnan Badran as Prime Minister. Bakhit's cabinet was announced November 27 (ref A). The new cabinet consists of 18 East Bankers and 6 West Bankers; the former government included 22 East Bankers and 6 West Bankers. Bakhit's government includes only one woman; Badran's cabinet had four. There are four fewer ministers in this cabinet. The Deputy PM slot and the Finance Ministry are now combined. The last cabinet had a second Deputy PM for Political Development and a Parliamentary Affairs Minister; in this cabinet the Political Development and Parliamentary Affairs Ministries have been combined, and the new Minister is not a Deputy PM. The Government Performance job has been eliminated, as has the post for Minister of State without portfolio. Ref B provides an assessment of Bakhit's prospects and priorities.

[1](#)2. (U) Members of the new government are:

[1](#)A. Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Marouf al-Bakhit:

(U) Muslim, East Banker. Born in 1947, Bakhit received a BA in public administration and political science from the University of Jordan, an MA in public administration from the University of Southern California, and a PhD from London University. He joined the Jordan Armed Forces (JAF) in 1964, graduating from the Royal Jordanian Military College in 1966 with the rank of second lieutenant. He retired from the army in 1999 as a major general. Bakhit has served as a professor of political science and vice president for military affairs at Mu'ta University. He was also director of studies, development, procurements, and personnel at the JAF. Bakhit was formerly Jordan's ambassador to Turkey and Israel, the latter appointment lasting just seven months until his appointment earlier this month as head of Jordan's embryonic National Security body. Bakhit traveled to the U.S. on an International Visitors (IV) program in 1993. He is fluent in English.

[1](#)B. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Ziad Fariz:

(U) Muslim, East Banker. Fariz, from the Salt area, is the son of a prominent writer. His sister, Dr. Nawar Fariz, MD, achieved the highest military rank any woman has reached in the JAF, in the late 1980s. Fariz received a diploma with honors in development planning from the Arab Institute for Planning in Kuwait in 1970, and a PhD in economics from Keel University in the UK in 1978. He was most recently chief executive officer of the Arab Banking Corporation, and a member of the advisory board of UNDP's Regional Bureau for Arab States. He served as Minister of Planning from April to December 1989, Minister of Industry and Trade from December

1989 to June 1991, and Minister of Planning again in June 1991. In November 1995, he was elected chairman of the board of the Bank of Export and Finance, and was later appointed governor of the Central Bank of Jordan until December 2000. Fariz was a member of the advisory board of, and key contributor to UNDP's Arab Human Development Report. Fariz is fluent in English.

(C) Fariz is a well-respected banker who tends to keep a low profile. His position clearly indicates that he will lead the cabinet's economic team, so his low profile may have come to an end. He will be challenged, as were his predecessors, by a central budget he did not create. His stint as governor of the Central Bank of Jordan should help address Post's concerns that the Ministry of Finance and the CBJ do not discuss and synchronize fiscal and monetary policy. Fariz is also known as a micro-manager who can be hard on his staff. He is a chain smoker, and likes three-hour meetings. He demands the fealty of his staff, and is reputed to take their advice into consideration. He is an economic liberal.

C. Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdul Ilah Khatib:

(U) Muslim, East Banker. Born in Salt in 1953, Khatib is a graduate of Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, holding a master's degree in international economics and development. He also obtained a master's degree in international communications from American University in Washington, and holds a BA in political science from the School of Political Science in Athens, Greece. Khatib served as chairman of the board of Jordan Cement Factories Company, where he was managing director from 1996 to 1998. He previously served as Foreign Minister from 1998 to 2002, and as Minister of Tourism and Antiquities from 1995 to 1996. Khatib also served as the coordinator of the Kingdom's negotiating team during the 1993-1994 peace talks between Jordan and Israel, as head of the Social Bureau of the Foreign Ministry, and as a political officer at Jordan's embassy in Washington. Khatib is well known to and respected by embassy and USAID officers. He is married and has three children. He is fluent in English.

D. Minister of Interior Eid Fayez:

(U) Muslim, East Banker. Fayez obtained a BA in economics and political science from Beirut Arab University in 1970. He was appointed director general of the Jordanian-Iraqi Transport Company in 1983, director general of the Ports Corporation in 1986, and secretary general of the Ministry of Youth in 1990. He was made an advisor at the Royal Court in 1993, and subsequently served as Minister of Labor in 1999, and as Minister of Youth and State in 2001.

E. Minister of Municipal Affairs Nader Thuheirat:

(U) Muslim, East Banker. Born in North Shuneh in 1942, Thuheirat has a BA in history from Damascus University, and worked as a teacher and supervisor in the Ministry of Education for 16 years. He was elected mayor of North Shuneh for three consecutive terms, and was a member of the 11th and 12th Parliaments. Thuheirat has previously served as Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs, and was appointed senator, twice.

F. Minister of Public Works and Housing Hosni Abu Gheida:

(U) Muslim, West Banker. Born in Haifa in 1944, Abu Gheida obtained a BA in architecture from the University of Aleppo in Syria in 1972. He worked in the private sector in engineering, architecture, administration, and planning from 1972 to 1999. He has served as president of the Jordan Engineers Association, lecturer of architectural design at the Universities of Jordan and Aleppo, board member of the Jordanian Arbitrators Association, and member of the Arab Chamber of Arbitrators. Abu Gheida, who is a recipient of the King's Al Kawkab Medal of the First Order, previously served as Minister of Public Works and Housing during the cabinet of Prime Minister Ali Abul Ragheb. He also

previously served as Jordan's ambassador to Lebanon.

G. Minister of Education and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Khalid Toukan:

(SBU) Muslim, East Banker. Born in 1954 in Amman, Toukan obtained a BSc from the American University of Beirut, an MA from Michigan State University, and a PhD from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Prior to entering government service, he served as head of the Nuclear Engineering Department and as Dean of the Department of Engineering and Technology at the University of Jordan, as well as President of al-Balqa'a Applied Science University. He has served as Minister of Education since his appointment by PM Abul Ragheb in June 2000. Toukan has worked very closely with the Embassy on education reform, especially USAID's comprehensive education reform program. He is married and has two sons and a daughter. He is fluent in English.

(C) Toukan is the longest serving member of the cabinet. Toukan's strong academic and reformist credentials, coupled with his experience as Minister since 2000, should help him as he continues to work toward his chief goal - introducing civic education in Jordan's public schools. His continued tenure is a vote of confidence in Toukan's performance so far. He is well respected for his serious focus on reform of the education sector. Though he is not bureaucratically astute, he has moved the reform agenda forward, due in no small part to his close partnership with the USG.

H. Minister of Justice Abed Shakhanbeh:

(U) Muslim, East Banker. Born in Madaba in 1950, Shakhanbeh obtained a BA in law from Damascus University in 1971, an MA in law from the University of Jordan in 1987, and a PhD from Cairo University in 1992. He worked in the Ministry of Justice from 1973 until 1992, when he was appointed secretary general of the inspection and control department. He became director of the department in 1995, and remained in the post until his appointment as Minister of State for Legal Affairs in 2001. In 2003, he served as director of the Audit Bureau, until he became minister for the second time later that year.

After he left office, Shakhanbeh worked as an advocate and a lecturer at Amman Private University. He served as Minister of Justice in the previous cabinet after the mini-reshuffle in early July, 2005, and has proven to be a reliable partner in our justice reform programs managed by USAID. Shakhanbeh has traveled to the U.S. as part of a USG sponsored legal exchange program.

I. Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Azmi Khreisat:

(U) Muslim, East Banker. Born in 1956, Khreisat holds an MA in electrical engineering from Manchester University in the UK. He served as director of the Department of Industrial Power at the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources before he became secretary general in October 2001. Khreisat has been director general of the Jordanian Petroleum Refinery since April 2003. He has been a good contact of the Embassy, both as secretary general and at the refinery company. He has worked closely with the Trade and Development Agency on TDA-supported projects. Khreisat was appointed Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources in the Fayez cabinet in October 2003. He is married with three children. He is fluent in English.

(SBU) Through his government and business experience in the energy field, Khreisat has earned a reputation for being very knowledgeable about the sector.

J. Minister of Health Sa'id Darwazeh:

(U) Muslim, West Bank origin. Born in Kuwait in 1957, he obtained a BSc in industrial engineering from Purdue University and an MBA from INSEAD, the elite international business program in France. He was president of the family-owned Hikma Pharmaceuticals Company from 1995 to 2003. Hikma is probably the most successful Jordanian

pharmaceutical company to prosper under Jordan's new intellectual property regime. It has obtained FDA and EU approval for exports to the U.S. and to Europe, and has invested in a New Jersey-based subsidiary. Once considered an unusual choice for Jordan's Health Ministry due to his business background, Darwazeh has served as Minister since his October 2003 appointment during Fayez's cabinet. USAID credits Darwazeh's steady leadership at the head of the ministry for the successes they have had in their health reform efforts over the last two years. He is fluent in English.

(C) Darwazeh's business background has helped him address, but not yet overcome, some of the difficulties faced by international drug companies when registering and protecting their products in Jordan, as well as to begin the painstaking process of reforming the over-staffed and inefficient public health care system. We expect Darwazeh to continue focusing on developing Jordan's potential as a regional center for advanced medical care. He has worked well with USAID on our large health reform programs.

1K. Minister of Transport Saud Nsairat:

(U) Muslim, East Banker. Born in 1950 in Natfeh in Irbid Governorate, Nsairat joined the Air Force upon his graduation from high school and was trained as a pilot. While serving in the military, he earned a master's degree in military affairs management. From 1992 to 1994, he served as Jordan's military attach to Paris. A career officer, Nsairat became Air Force commander in the JAF in 1999, serving in that position until 2002, when he was promoted to vice-chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He retired on October 1, 2004, and was appointed Minister of Transport later that month. He is married and has two sons and one daughter. He is fluent in English.

1L. Minister of Industry and Trade Sharif Zu'bi:

(U) Muslim, West Banker. Born in 1963 in Amman, Zu'bi obtained a BA in law and an MA in commercial law from the University of Bristol in 1984 and 1985, respectively. He has been an advocate and managing partner for Ali Sharif Zu'bi and Sharif Ali Zu'bi Law Firm since 1985, where he has focused his own practice on advising the government regarding tenders and contracts on large infrastructure projects. Zu'bi is a member of numerous boards and professional associations, including the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Jordan, Royal Jordanian airlines, King Hussein Cancer Center, and Jordan Micro Credit Company. He has published articles and spoken at international conferences on judicial reform. Zu'bi has authored guides on doing business in Jordan and the Middle East, such as the Companies' Registration Guide, which was commissioned by USAID and prepared in association with Allied Accountants/Arthur Anderson. He is fluent in English.

(SBU) Since his appointment under the Badran cabinet, Zu'bi has shown a steely determination to confront inefficiencies in his ministry and a desire to recruit new talent, which should soon be evident in a new industrial investment staff. A number of initiatives and reforms which had been languishing at the ministry prior to his appointment have begun to gain traction. Several of these are directly reflected in the National Agenda. However, he has been saddled with weak or marginal holdover appointees in a number of slots just below him that gained their civil service jobs under his predecessor; unfortunately, that is also where their loyalties lie. Despite the shortcomings among some of his staff, Zu'bi has exhibited a refreshing ability to solve problems creatively. He abandoned the souq mentality under which the ministry formerly held out for every possible small gain in negotiations without consideration of priorities.

1M. Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Suhair Al-Ali:

(U) Muslim, West Banker. The only woman to be named to

Bakhit's cabinet, Al-Ali holds a master's degree in development economics from Georgetown University. She served as general manager of the Saudi American Bank Representative Office from 1993 until 1996, when she became general manager and country officer of Citigroup in Jordan. Al-Ali, who is married with children, is the daughter of Embassy Amman's long-time Arabic language instructor. She served in the same capacity in the last cabinet. Al-Ali is fluent in English.

1N. Minister of Environment Khalid Irani:

(U) Muslim, East Banker. Born in 1964, Irani earned a BSc and MSc from the University of Jordan. Formerly a research assistant at the University of Jordan and manager of the Protected Areas Department at the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN), Irani served as director general of the RSCN until his appointment as Minister during Badran's cabinet. He has worked closely with USAID on numerous projects, and has occasionally gone on hikes with embassy officers and their families. He is married and has two children. Irani traveled to the U.S. on an IV program in 11993. He is fluent in English.

(C) Irani is seen by USAID officers who have worked with him as an "idea guy" more than an administrator. That said, the ministry, which was established following the signing of the U.S. - Jordan FTA, has become a viable institution under his leadership. He is very bright, presentable, and close to the Palace, due to his extensive work with RSCN.

1O. Minister of Labor Bassam al-Salem:

(U) Christian, East Banker. Born in 1956 in al-Husn in Irbid Governorate, and son of the late former Senator and Central Bank Governor Khalid al-Salem, Bassam al-Salem earned a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering from the University of London in 1979. Upon his return to Jordan in the early 1980s, he started a manufacturing plant to produce plastics and packaging materials. He expanded his business into several manufacturing facilities, including confectioneries, as well as founding a trading company. He recently acquired one of the smaller mining operation that was privatized by the government. In the mid 1990s he co-founded the Jordan Export and Finance Bank, and still serves on its board. He also served as board member of the Central Bank of Jordan. Salem was appointed Labor Minister in Badran's cabinet. Salem is married with one son. He is fluent in English.

(C) Salem has recently concentrated his legal work on GOJ government contracts, especially tenders on big infrastructure projects, including USAID-funded projects. He has a cosmopolitan outlook, displays an obvious love for the law, and can converse easily on diverse subjects such as regional Arab artists. He travels to England regularly. When he was first appointed Minister, he was very optimistic that his "fresh" approach to government would help root out inefficiencies. After several months, that enthusiasm waned, and he was at one point skeptical that he would remain very long in government.

1P. Minister of Public Sector Reform Salem Khazaaleh:

(U) Muslim, East Banker. Born in Dajania in Mafrq Governorate in 1963, Khazaaleh holds a bachelor's degree in law and a master's degree in legal philosophy from the University of Jordan. He worked as a lawyer for several banks and companies for 13 years. Over the past two-and-a-half years, he has served as chairman of the GOJ's Audit Bureau. Khazaaleh's wife is of Palestinian origin, and works at the Jordan University of Science and Technology. Khazaaleh does not speak English very well, but he is improving.

(SBU) USAID staffers who have worked with Khazaaleh regard him as intelligent and incorruptible.

1Q. Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Abdul Fattah Salah:

(U) Muslim, East Banker. Born in Maan in 1946, Salah holds a BA in Islamic Sharia from Damascus University, and has held several official posts, most recently as secretary general of the Awqaf Ministry. He also served as vice president of the Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Council, and deputy chairman of the board of trustees of the Da'wa and Usul College (a state-run Islamic community college). Salah, who was awarded the GOJ's Al Istiklal Medal, served on the committee concerned with the renovation of the Aqsa Mosque and other Islamic sites in Jerusalem.

1R. Minister of Water and Irrigation Thafer Alem:

(U) Muslim, West Banker. Born in Jaffa in 1940, Alem completed his secondary education at the Jordan Armed Forces Schools in Zarqa in 1958. He obtained a BSc in applied geology in 1964 from Cairo University and was appointed water resources engineer in 1964. He obtained an MSc in underground and surface water engineering from London University in 1969, and another MSc in water engineering and water facilities from the University of Utah in 1973, as well as an irrigation engineering diploma from Colorado University in 1974. He served as dams engineer at Al Rawafed Institution between 1964 and 1973, and worked in the Jordan Valley Authority (JVA) in water resources development. He was appointed JVA deputy director in 1981, and has been secretary general of the Water and Irrigation Ministry since

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12000. Alem is a very good contact of the embassy, and has always been cooperative and accessible. He is fluent in English.

(C) Alem's main areas of focus have been the Red-Dead water conveyance proposal, and the Unity Dam between Syria and Jordan. He has very good relations with his Israeli counterparts. Alem knows the Jordan Valley as well as anyone in the GOJ. He is pleasant and likable, and is regarded as 'the' dam expert. Unfortunately, the JVA is not well regarded. It recovers only 25 - 30% of its operating costs. Efforts to reform the JVA, including a USAID offer to commercialize the agency, have been declined. USAID does not expect Alem to be a strong voice for the implementation of the National Agenda or necessary reforms in the water sector. He is quick to agree to a proposal, but lacks the necessary follow-through.

1S. Minister of Agriculture Akef Zu'bi:

(U) Muslim, East Banker. Born in 1950 in Ramtha, Zu'bi earned a BSc in agricultural sciences from the University of Aleppo in 1974, a master's in agricultural economics from the University of Jordan in 1990, and a PhD in economics from Nilean University (a private university in the Sudan), which he completed via distance learning in 2000. He assumed several posts in the agricultural sector, serving as director of the Agricultural Marketing Corporation in 1986 until its dismantling per WTO requirements. He was made director of the Agricultural Marketing Department of the Ministry of Agriculture in 2002, and was appointed secretary general of the Ministry of Agriculture in 2004. He does not have good English, and prefers not to use it.

(C) Zu'bi is a former member of one of Jordan's Syrian-leaning Ba'ath parties, though he did not hold a leadership position. His wife is the sister of the former Palestinian Minister of Finance Salam Fayyad. His wife is a retired government official, now working for a private research company.

1T. Minister of Culture Adel Tweisi:

(U) Muslim, East Banker. Born in Mafrag in 1953, Tweisi obtained his master's degree and PhD from the University of Michigan in 1984 and 1987, respectively, and a BA in English literature from the University of Jordan in 1978. He also was the recipient of a post-doctoral Fulbright research

grant. He served as professor of English literature in Al Hussein Ben Talal University and Mu'ta University, and then as dean of the faculty of art and dean of student affairs at Mu'ta University. Tweisi has been a member of the Higher Education Council since 1999. He was president of Al Hussein Ben Talal University from 1999 to 2004. He is married and has four sons and one daughter. Tweisi is fluent in English.

IV. Minister of Political Development and Parliamentary Affairs Sabri Rbeihat:

(U) Muslim, East Banker. Rbeihat obtained his BSc in education and sociology from the University of Jordan in 1976, followed by three MAs and a PhD in sociology from the University of Southern California. He has served as senior adviser to the UN on disability issues since May 2004, and also as assistant professor and chairman of the Philadelphia University Social Science Department. He is president and founder of the South-North Centre for Dialogue and Development, and former senior planning consultant and head of the research and planning unit at the Supreme Council for Family Affairs in Qatar. Rbeihat headed the research and planning unit at the Directorate of Rehabilitation and Correctional Centers in Jordan between January and June 1991. He also headed the training unit of the Royal Police Academy in Jordan from October 1998 and August 2000. Rbeihat traveled to the U.S. on an IV program in 1994.

(C) Rbeihat's wife is related to a former minister. They have no children, and it is rumored that they have been separated for some time, though not officially.

IV. Minister of Social Development Suleiman Tarawneh:

(U) Muslim, East Banker. Born in Al Khaldieh village outside of Karak, Tarawneh holds a BA and an MA in military sciences. He also obtained a master's degree in military and administrative sciences from Muta University, another MA in strategic and defense studies from Pakistan, and a PhD in history from Baghdad University. Tarawneh joined the JAF in 1965, and assumed several posts including chairman of the Guidance Commission at the Royal War College, director of personnel affairs at the General Army Headquarters, and military commander. Tarawneh is the recipient of several medals in the fields of leadership, training, and administration.

(C) Tarawneh's military background might leave him ill-prepared to head a ministry that has the lead on NGO and civil society issues.

IV. Minister of Tourism and Antiquities Munir Nassar:

(SBU) Christian at birth, converted to Islam, West Banker. Born in Jaffa in 1943, Nassar obtained a bachelor's degree in commerce from the American University in Beirut in 1963. One of the founders of the Jordan Inbound Tour Operators Association, Nassar served in the Royal Jordanian Airlines London office in the 1960s. He is a member of the National Tourism Strategy Committee and the National Tourism Council. Until his appointment, Nassar was general manager of International Traders, the oldest tourism agency in Jordan, which was started by his father in 1948. As a tour operator, Nassar has had several innovations, including the Kan Zaman restaurant complex in Amman, a "tourist village" in Wadi Musa, and exclusive marketing of the "Jordan Experience" IMAX theater in Aqaba. He is also the agent for American Express in Jordan. Nassar is fluent in English.

(C) With a strong background in promoting tourism via the private sector, Nassar should mesh well with the King's reform agenda. USAID has worked closely with Nassar in his capacity as a member of the National Tourism Strategy Committee and the National Tourism Council. He is a staunch supporter of voluntary trade associations, and is one of the founding members of the Jordan Inbound Tour Operators Association, which is the only non-mandatory trade

association in the tourism sector. USAID had strong positive feelings toward his predecessor, Alia Bouran, but foresees no problems working closely with Nassar. Nassar was reportedly close to bankruptcy at one point, and tried to sell the American Express business to climb out of debt.

1X. Minister of Information and Communications Technology
Omar Kurdi:

(U) Muslim, East Banker of Kurdish origin. Born in 1965, Kurdi holds a BA and an MA in communications engineering from the Georgia Institute of Technology. He is a member of the board of directors of Royal Jordanian Airlines, and he served as a member in the consultation committee for the communications sector in 1996. Kurdi was in the JAF from 1987 to 1991, where he worked at the JAF's special communication commission. Since 1991, and until his appointment as minister, Kurdi worked in the private sector in the communications sector, as an advisor and then director of the Near East Technologies Company (NET), a company with interests in aviation, defense, and telecommunications. NET is both a representative of international suppliers as well as a consulting services provider. Kurdi's focus was telecommunications. Kurdi's father was Yasser Arafat's physician.

(C) Considering his strong background in telecommunications, Kurdi should be able to take positive steps to address the problems of telecom regulation and work toward getting the Telecom Regulatory Commission back on track, a role that his predecessor has recently promised to take on.

13. (U) Minimize considered.
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